

## Homily – The Baptism of Jesus

January 8, 2023

One thing Sharon learned about me from the very beginning of our life together was to never, never, ever ask me to do any sort or form of renovation or repair to anything in the house or car or cottage or, indeed, anywhere. I am what is wonderfully called an “all thumbs” kinda guy or as my son and daughter so often say with massive eyerolls, “Oh that Dad!” While I may not know one end of a screwdriver from another or be trusted with a chainsaw, they do recognize that I do have some strengths – I am a passable chef, I used to be able to sing from memory every Beatles song; I can be relied on to provide sappy poetry for birthdays and anniversaries and I do know my history and my trivia! When I say that I am in many ways a Renaissance man, at least I know what and when the Renaissance was!

My fascination with the past has held me in good stead I think through the years and I really discovered how invaluable it is to understand the past in order to appreciate the present and dream the future when I was at Trinity, taking my first courses in Biblical studies. I learned from the gitgo that the narrative I had been given in my youth about life in the early Church was not all that accurate and that in order to make real sense of the Biblical story, I had to be aware of the forces at play in the time of the primitive Church which were to shape the how and why of the community. As I moved deeper and deeper into the story of the Church through the centuries, I began to become more and more aware of the times when the Church was changed positively and negatively when it ignored its story or when it remembered the tale...

We are a changing and a changed world...we are a changing and a changed Church...what once was is no longer in almost every aspect of our lives: I once reflected on my grandmother's story when preparing to help her celebrate her ninety-fifth birthday – of how she had journeyed from Shropshire in England to Halifax by boat, then gone by train to Montreal and what is now called The Lakehead; of her travelling across the top of the Great Lakes and the Canadian Shield to Winnipeg by oxcart where her beloved waited for her. As I looked at this very wonderful person, it dawned on me about what she had witnessed in her lifetime – the advent of the telephone and the automobile, the airplane and the horrors of so many wars. For this woman who had homesteaded on the Manitoba plain, she had witnessed the incredible image of someone using a nine iron to hit a golf ball on the moon! Now, that was change. It is hard to remember the days when I used a manual and then an electric typewriter and a zerox and gestetner machine to produce my essays and sermons, of

when my music came from flat plastic disks going round and round on a turntable; when McDonalds didn't exist... Times have changed since my childhood and I KNOW things will change as I age and after I am gone, for that is the nature of life – life is not a static, unmoveable object but rather a dynamic, everflowing river. The one constant is that it is unconstant – always in a state of becoming, of moving from what was and is to what could be, will be. The history of the Church is that dynamic, yet... through all the times and changes, there are certain things that remain as constants. Jesus spoke of this when he told the story of two men building houses: one built his dwelling on a firm foundation of rock and stone, the other opted to raise his structure from a foundation of sand. When the winds came and whipped around the two houses, the one of stone survived even though its exterior walls might have blown away, for its base, its roots were deeply nestled in the land while the other house was not only destroyed but carried away by the winds, leaving

no trace that it ever existed. Jesus tells this story to encourage his followers to discover and treasure their roots and the firm foundations upon which their faith and their lives are to be built and flourish in their present and in the future.

So, where do we begin this look at roots ? While I want to use Luke's narrative of the primitive Church we call The Book of Acts to help us in our own discernment process here in this parish, I think we need to go back in time...back to when Jesus was only a young lad on a trip to Jerusalem for the High Holidays. He is separated from his family because of the confusion of the crowds (at least that's what Joseph and Mary and Jesus' siblings believed) and after much searching, Jesus is found listening to and debating with the Scribes and the Pharisees in the Temple. Upon finding him, his parents launch into a very human response: "What were you thinking? We were beside ourselves with fear that you had been

kidnapped or killed or..or.. did you not think even once of us, your poor parents and your brothers and sisters?” To this, Jesus says, “Do you not get it...that I had to be in my Father’s house?” This story leads us to believe that, at least in the thinking of Matthew and Luke and the earliest creators of the gospels, Jesus was aware of his place and role in the history of the cosmos at even that tender age. Luke ends this bit of Jesus’ “biography” by stating, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and humankind.”

Now, we run into a problem – there is no account yet discovered of the life of Jesus from the age of twelve until his thirtieth year – these are called the “hidden years” and for most of us, these are the years when we grow and hopefully mature and discover who we are and what we are capable of being and doing and making life choices that will shape our time on this good earth. Yet, the gospel narratives, except for a few very questionable documents remain silent, like

wind in the desert. We can speculate until the cows come home about what happened in those eighteen years but that's all they will be – guesses – until more gospels or other narratives emerge that will define what Jesus lived through in those formative years. What we do know is that he emerges from the obscurity of the Galilee, from Nazara, at about the age of thirty, intent upon following his second cousin John (called the Baptizer) on his mission of forewarning the children of Israel that life is going to change and change soon... and that he finds John on the shores of a rather narrow stream called the Jordan on the edge of the desert. There, John is preaching and baptising those who wish to participate in whatever the future holds. Jesus enters the waters and is baptized by John and in that moment. John becomes aware that the future and the present and the past now all are meeting together in this Jeshua bar-Joseph. The gospel writers agree on several things about this moment: that Jesus was baptised, that as he emerged from the waters the clouds rolled back and light

poured down, as Johni Mitchell writes, “like butterscotch” and that something unique was happening. The writers agree that a voice is heard but here they part ways: Mark, the first chronicler of the Jesus story writes that the Voice said, “You are my Son whom I love and with you I am well pleased”; Matthew says the Voice stated, “This is my Son whom I love and with whom I am well pleased”; Luke agrees with the Marcan version while John remains silent on the matter. Regardless, what matters here is that it is at his baptism that Jesus receives his marching orders from God now reveal the fullness of the kingdom news – not only to speak, but to act out and be the embodiment of all God’s hopes and dreams for his beloved ones. We too share that calling through our own baptism and we need to remember that when we were baptized as infants or adults, we became new creations, called and sent to be evangelists and agents of the Lord. If all we as Church are is a nice social club then we have failed the mark of discipleship – to be living examples of all that



Jesus said and did: we are to be his flesh and blood beatitudes, his sowers and good samaritans, his healers and embracers, his singers and dancers of the good news, his good shepherds and his found sheep.

As we begin our look at the pivotal moments in the Book of Acts that will I hope help us on our journey to, in Bishop Shane's words, "shape the future rather than be shaped by the future", let us try to be faithful to our foundation stone, Jesus of Nazareth.

Next week, ..... IN THE BEGINNING.....